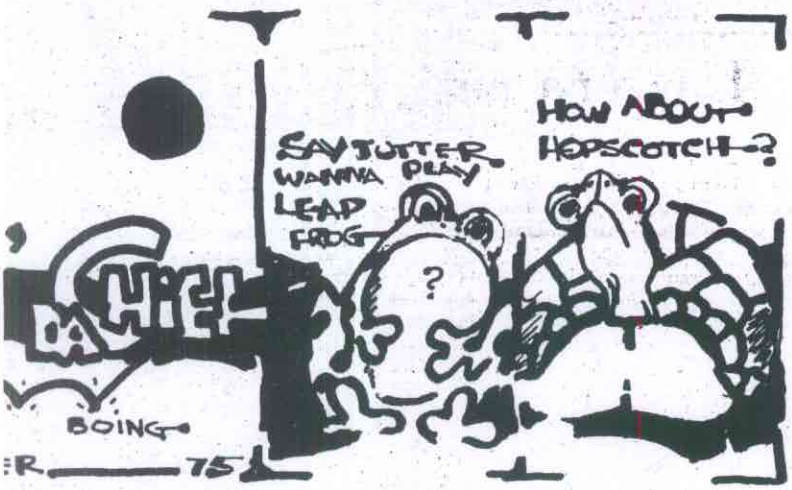

'James Bond meets the Godfather'

R.T. GAULT
Columnist

(Editor's Note: This is the first of two articles on Mafia/CIA connections.)

The recent stories concerning the relationship between the CIA and the Mafia have raised serious questions about who is in charge of our intelligence agencies. The CIA/Mafia scandal involves alleged collaboration between the kingpins of Chicago and Las Vegas organized crime, the Howard Hughes empire and our own spooks, in a plan to kill Castro in the early sixties. The CIA has attempted, in the last few months, to suggest that the alliance was of short duration; that the CIA has had limited dealing with organized crime. Actually, American Intelliegnce has had very close ties with the Mafia since the early days of World War II.

In 1942-43 the Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI) contracted major Mafia figure Lucky Luciano to help with an anti-sabotage project called "Operation Underworld." In return for helping ONI keep sabotage down on the New York docks, Luciano was moved to a minimum security prision where he could more easily give orders to Meyer Lansky, his second-in-command.

ONI used Luciano again to arrange close support from the Sicilian Mafia before the invasion of Sicily on July 9, 1943. In return, Mafia men were made liaison men with the U.S. Army, and appointed mayors of local villages. In 1946, Luciano was rewarded for his efforts. He was released from prison and deported to Italy. From 1946 to 1950, Luciano and Lansky built the classic heroin hierarchy involving the Corsican Mafia (Union Corse) in Marseilles, and the Florida Trafficante Family.

A primary link in this heroin pipeline was established in Cuba. The arrangements were finalized in a 1947 Havana meeting involving Luciano, Lansky and representatives of every large underworld operation in the USA. By the fifties, Mafia interests were allowed to blossom freely under the generous Cuban dictator Batista. Huge blocks of money from the Trafficante family (Tampa) and the Carlos Marcello Family (New Orleans) were invested in Cuba. Chicago Mafia money was "raked off" Las Vegas operations and sunk into the many casinos that sprang up in Havana's free-for-all atmosphere.

In 1947 the newly-formed CIA cemented the Union Corse's hold Marseilles. The Port of Marseilles was paralyzed by a series of "leftist oriented" union strikes. With typical anti-communist fervor, the fledgling CIA backed the powerful Corsican underworld in a power play against the leftist Unions. The Corsicans gained control of the docks and gained considerable political clout in French politics. The Union Corse heroin "factories" could then operate in Marseilles with a minimum of French government interference.

Either by accident or design, the CIA had provided ample support to the establish-

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ment of the mushrooming heroin trade. Most of this heroin ended up on the streets of America, creating one of the most serious social problems we have faced. All was done in the name of anti-communism.

The French Adventure gained the CIA valuable contacts that were instrumental in the take-over in Saigon in 1955. The CIA, personified by Edward G. Lansdale, moved into the vacuum after the French defeat. One of Lansdale's right hand men was Lucian Conein, a veteran of the Marsailles putsch. Lansdale and Conein, operating under the cover of the U.S.A. Saigon Military Mission, backed a coalition of river pirates, opium smugglers, and Saigon underworld types led by Ngo Ninh Diem. The CIA bought the loyalty of the hill tribes, the corrupt Saigon officials, and the Nationalist Chinese Army in exile in Southeast Asia (Kuomintang) by allowing the dope trade to flourish in return for intelligence gathering. The CIA often provided support and transport by use of its "slave" airlines such as Air America.

The involvement of the CIA in the 1963 Diem coup and assassination was mainly the work of Mr. Conein. According to the **Pentagon Papers,** Conein was the U.S. Government's link with the generals plotting against President Diem. Recently Conein told Sen. Frank Church's Security Committee investigation that he was in contact with Diem also. In fact Diem came to him for a safe conduct out of the country. Diem was in the process of escaping from the plotters when he was assassinated. The possibilities for a double-cross are obvious. Lucian Concin now works for the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency.

While our commitment in Vietnam was growing, Castro appeared out of the Cuban jungles to frustrate both rabid anti-communists and the "simple businessmen" of the Mafia. Some evidence suggests that both the CIA and the Mafia were aiding Castro before his 1959 take over. His romance with the Russians ended that. Treasury agents arrested scores of low level Mafia men involved in arms deals and shipments to Castro before and after 1959. A man named Frank Fiorini who, according to **Argosy,** July 75, worked for both the CIA and the Mafia at one time or another, was put in charge of Havana gambling for Castro in 1959. Mr. Fiorini is better known now as Frank Sturges of Watergate break-in fame. There may be a great deal of substance in critics' charges that the CIA's war against Castro is arm-in-arm with the Mob's desire to get back their lucrative Havana interests.

It may be coincidental, but Mafia fortune sometimes seems to follow CIA projects. Shortly after Edward Lansdale returned to Saigon in 1965, the Trafficante Family sent their own ambassador, Frank Furci, to establish contacts in Southeast Heroin. His work must have been successful because in 1968 Santo Trafficante, Jr. met with him in Hong Kong and then flew to Saigon to confer with Corsican connections. This "coincidental" cross-over of CIA and Mafia interests is not isolated, and when more information becomes available from present investigations, I believe that we will learn that the CIA has allowed itself to be sucked down into the lowest form of modern organized crime activities: Heroin traffic.

But now an even important question must be asked. Who was controling whom? (Part two on Monday).